CALIFORNIA

FARMLAND CONVERSION

REPORT

1996 - 98

Prepared by the Staff of the

FARMLAND MAPPING AND MONITORING PROGRAM

California Department of Conservation

JUNE 2000

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CREDITS

The Department of Conservation thanks the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service for providing modern soil survey maps and soil ratings. The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program relies on base information from the U.S. Geological Survey, the California Department of Water Resources, and Etak, Inc. for compilation of Important Farmland maps. Current aerial photography for the survey area has been provided by the High Altitude Missions Branch of NASA, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Consolidated Farm Service Agency, the Mojave Water Agency and private sector air photo libraries.

Data on areas participating in long-term agricultural set aside programs are provided courtesy of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Consolidated Farm Service Agency; and on lands converted to wildlife habitat by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Game, the Kern County Water Bank Authority, ARCO Products Co., and The Nature Conservancy.

The Department of Conservation also acknowledges the assistance it has received from map reviewers including county and city planning offices, county agricultural commissioners, resource conservation districts, Natural Resources Conservation Service district conservationists, California Farm Bureau Federation, University of California Cooperative Extension, California Cattlemen's Association, local water and irrigation districts, public interest groups, and building industry representatives. Many of these groups also participated in development of the Farmland of Local Importance definitions for their respective counties.

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The changing face of California's landscape can be witnessed not only in the urban and suburban areas of the state, but also in the vast agricultural regions stretching from Siskiyou County to San Diego County. Long-term residents and visitors alike can easily observe the changes human impact has on the land, but few appreciate the significance such impacts make on the economic and environmental fabric of this dynamic and resource-rich state.

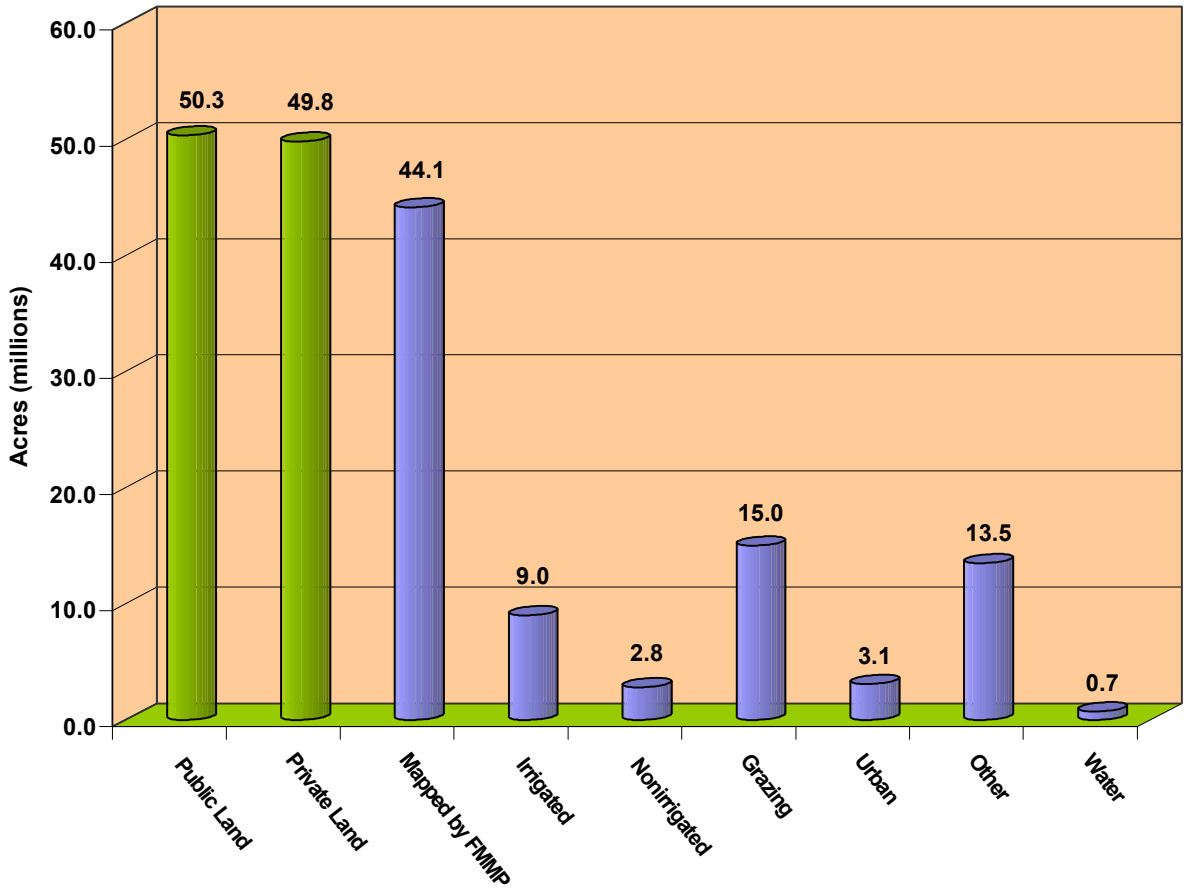

Figure 1. California Land Use, 1998
Extent of public and private lands in green, and lands mapped by the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) in purple.
Approximately 89% of private land in California is mapped every two years by FMMP.
Source: California Department of Conservation, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, 1998 and California Almanac, Pacific Data Resources, 1991.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Irrigated farmland lost ground to large new urban increases as the California Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) conducted its 1998 biennial land use inventory.

This inventory of agricultural and urban land use covers 44.1 million acres of the state's private and public land. The inventory covers 48 counties, 46 of which have modern soil surveys, and represents approximately 90 percent of the agricultural land in the state.

Maps and land use conversion statistics are provided to county and city officials to assist in the planning and management of California's resources. The *California Farmland Conversion Report 1996-98* represents the seventh biennial mapping cycle of the FMMP.

The overall urbanization rate during the 1998 inventory was up 25 percent from the previous reporting period

The 1998 update found 69,885 net new acres of Urban and Built-Up Land (Urban Land), compared to 55,896 new acres of Urban Land in 1996. A total of 21,664 acres (31 percent) of the new Urban Land came from irrigated farmland, up from 17,385 acres in 1996. The amount of Urban Land coming from marginal and nonirrigated categories in 1998 was 48,221 acres. Southern California, the San Joaquin Valley and the San Francisco Bay regions led the state in the amount of new Urban Land from all mapping categories.

The total amount of irrigated farmland in the project area declined by 40,473 acres. Prime Farmland accounted for most of the shift with a loss of 33,412 acres, followed by Farmland of Statewide Importance, losing 20,771 acres. The most common reasons for irrigated farmland loss were the cessation or idling of irrigated crop production, conversions to low density rural housing, urban residential and commercial development, and new golf courses.

Many losses to farmland were offset by new irrigated lands, especially vineyards, on lesser quality soils

Seventeen counties showed a net increase in farmland. The largest increases were in Santa Barbara, Sonoma and San Luis Obispo counties and the Sierra Valley area of Lassen, Plumas and Sierra counties. These counties recorded 18,390 acres of new irrigated farmland. The planting of new vineyards accounted for much of the

net increase in the three coastal counties. Newly identified irrigated pasture and alfalfa fields accounted for most of the new gains in the Sierra Valley. New farmland was also found in Madera County with the planting of deciduous orchards, and in Siskiyou County with new alfalfa plantings and irrigated pasture. Regions showing the largest increases in irrigated farmland were the Northeastern and Central Coast with a combined total of over 20,000 acres.

The Southern California Region showed the largest numerical increase in Urban, with 30,306 acres

The San Joaquin Valley Region ranked second in the growth of new Urban Land, marking a gain of 14,414 acres. In the San Francisco Bay Region there were 12,472 acres of new Urban Land, and the Sacramento Valley Region showed a gain of 6,791 acres. The Sierra Foothill Region experienced an increase of 3,276 Urban acres during the 1998 inventory.

Among all regions of the state, the San Joaquin Valley Region led in conversions of irrigated farmland to Urban, with 9,505 acres

Southern California ranked second in the conversion of irrigated farmland to Urban Land, with 6,817 acres. A total of 66 percent of the new Urban Land in the San Joaquin Valley Region, and 22 percent of new Urban Land in Southern California came from irrigated land. Riverside and Fresno counties led the state in the amount of irrigated land converted to Urban Land, with 2,335 and 2,269 acres respectively, followed by Orange County with 1,951 acres.

Riverside County led the state with 8,902 acres of new Urban Land, 2,335 acres coming from land previously mapped as irrigated farmland. Orange County followed with 7,740 of new Urban Land, with Kern County (4,343 acres), San Diego County (4,322 acres) and Fresno County (4,016 acres) rounding out the top five.

There was an 11 percent increase statewide in the amount of land reported as committed to future nonagricultural use, from 184,588 acres in 1996 to 205,746 acres in 1998. During the 1998 inventory there were 43,693 acres of irrigated land identified as committed to nonagricultural use, compared with 50,845 acres during the 1996 period.